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RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO 2397  
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RUEHCI/AMCONSUL CALCUTTA 0356  
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RUCPDO/DEPT OF COMMERCE WASHDC  
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RHMFISS/HQ USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NEW DELHI 009504

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [IN](#) [NP](#) [BT](#)  
SUBJECT: BHUTAN KING TO ABDICATE IN 2008, DEEPENING  
DEMOCRACY IN THE HIMALAYAS

Classified By: PolCouns Geoff Pyatt for Reasons 1.4 (B, D)

¶1. (U) Wire services and the on-line Bhutanese newspaper Kuensel.com reported on December 18 that King Jigme Singye Wangchuck announced he would abdicate the throne to the well-regarded and modest Crown Prince (known in Bhutan as the Chhoetse Penlop) Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck in 2008. Kuensel.com reported that the King stated the abdication will coincide with the first national election under the new constitution. This is the first time the RGOB has given a date for the adoption of the constitution and related elections. While the announcement came as a surprise, the King's desire to create a constitutional monarchy in the Kingdom of "Gross National Happiness" remains a clear priority. We hold favorable views of the Crown Prince, with whom we have interacted in official and casual settings, including the basketball court.

A King Plans for the Future  
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¶2. (U) King Wangchuck demonstrated once again his commitment to the democratic reform process he launched, as well as his willingness to devolve authority by announcing he would hand over the title of Druk Gyalpo (The Thunder King) to his son earlier than the draft constitution's stipulated age of 65. King Wangchuck's unexpected decision to give up sovereign rule and create a constitutional monarchy is one of the few instances in recent history in which an absolute monarch voluntarily hands over power to his people. His decision to abdicate at the age of 53 reinforces this commitment to a devolution of power to his people and promulgation of a

constitutional monarchy.

¶3. (C) Our best guess at this stage is that the King may have decided to abdicate earlier than expected in order to afford the Crown Prince time to rule while he could still seek guidance from his father. During an October 2004 meeting with DRL A/S Dewey and PolOff, the King mentioned that it was not the job of "old men" to rule a country, and that the younger generation must bring Bhutan forward. Also, the three prior kings in the Wangchuck Dynasty have died relatively young, leaving the successors to begin their reign at a young age. The second king assumed the crown at age 21, the third king did so at age 24, and the current King ruled when he was only 17 years old. The Crown Prince would be 28 years old when he assumes the throne in 2008.

Comment: The Next King and the NBA

¶4. (C) PolOff had the opportunity to met the Crown Prince on a number of occasions while the prince was in New Delhi attending the Indian National Defense College during 2005. The Crown Prince attended Cushing Academy (MA) and Wheaton College (MA) in the USA before graduating from Oxford University in 2000 with a degree in Political Science. He noted that he enjoyed his time in the US and holds a very positive opinion about America. The Crown Prince was easy to talk to and was not overly concerned with status and formalities. The Crown Prince played varsity basketball while studying in the US and is a fan of the National Basketball Association. Upon learning this, PolOff invited

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him to play with the embassy men's basketball league, to which the Crown Prince agreed.

¶5. (U) Arriving at the American Embassy School with a body guard, his personal assistant and two other members of the Bhutanese Embassy, the Crown Prince noted that he had not had the chance to play much recently and was not sure how well he would perform. However, after playing two games with him, PolOff can report that the future king of Bhutan is a "natural two-guard," has a good shot and ball control, and is quick enough to drive the lane to score. His favorite NBA team is the Philadelphia 76ers.

¶6. (C) Like his father, the Crown Prince smokes cigarettes, which is noteworthy considering his father outlawed smoking in the Kingdom in 2004. Officers at the Bhutanese Embassy told us that the Crown Prince was friendly, easy to get along with, and did not require the formalities typically afforded to the royal family. (Note: He lived in the Bhutanese Embassy compound along with the other Embassy employees while attending the National Defense College. End Note.) The Crown Prince is highly respected in Bhutan and is active in the community. He is the chief patron of the Scouts Association of Bhutan, has spoken at the UNGA on children's issues, and is an active proponent of environmental conservation. The Crown Prince also earned the respect of the Bhutanese people when he participated, reportedly near the front lines, in the December 2003 military operation to remove United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA), Kamatapur Liberation Organization (KLO), and National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) camps from southern Bhutan. His friendly demeanor and social activism is atypical for crown princes in the Himalayan region.

¶7. (U) Visit New Delhi's Classified Website:  
(<http://www.state.gov/p/sa/newdelhi/>)  
BLAKE